



Fulton, H. (2016). Ceredigion: Strata Florida and Llanbadarn Fawr. In D. Wallace (Ed.), *Europe: A Literary History, 1348-1418* (Vol. 1, pp. 438–454). Oxford University Press.  
<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/europe-9780199580019?cc=gb&lang=en>

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## Chapter 26

# Ceredigion: Strata Florida and Llanbadarn Fawr

HELEN FULTON

In the last quarter of the fourteenth century, the Welsh poet Iolo Goch described a journey through Wales, an imaginary bardic circuit that in fact maps the parameters of the medieval literary tradition in Wales. Iolo's journey, undertaken whimsically by his own soul as his body lies in a drunken haze, takes him from his home in Denbighshire, in the north-east, towards the south-west as far as Kidwelly and the Cistercian monastery of Whitland, in Carmarthenshire. Then the soul begins the return journey, tracing a well-known route northwards through Ceredigion via Whitland's daughter-house at Strata Florida, about 20 miles (32 km) south-east of the borough town of Aberystwyth. His most significant stop along the journey through Ceredigion is at the manor house of Parchrhydderch, home of a dynasty of patrons of medieval Welsh literature:

Corff: Beth yw y bu i'th ofyn,  
Abad y Tŷ gwinllad Gwyn?  
Enaid: It ddyfod ato i Ddyfed,  
Ac od ei ti a gei ged;  
Gyr gennad yn goeladwy  
I gyrchu morc, ac arch mwy.  
Deffro, oddyno ydd awn  
Ger dugiaeth Geredigiawn,  
Doniog yw'r oludog wlad,  
Ac annerch Rhydderch rhoddiad  
Ab Ieuan Llwyd, annwyd arth,  
Probost, hoywbost Deheubarth.  
Hawdd gan Rydderch serchlawn  
Rhoddi ei dda yn rhwydd iawn.  
Abad, ni ad arnad ing,  
Tir Fflur, er rhoi tair fflwring.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Welsh text and translation are from *Iolo Goch: Poems*, no. 14, ll. 67–82.



FIGURE 26 Strata Florida Abbey.

Photo: Helen Fulton.

Body: What did he ask you,  
the abbot of the wine-drinking White House [Whitland]?  
Soul: For you to come to him to Dyfed,  
and if you go you'll get a gift;

send an authorised messenger  
to fetch a mark, and ask for more.  
Wake up, from there we'll go  
towards the duchy of Ceredigion,  
the wealthy land is richly endowed,  
and greet Rhydderch the giver  
son of Ieuan Llwyd, nature of a bear,  
provost, fine post of Deheubarth.  
Loving Rhydderch finds it easy  
to give away his goods very freely.  
The abbot of the land of Florida [Strata Florida] will not let you  
suffer any distress, though he give you three florins.

From Whitland to Strata Florida via Parcrhydderch, this route encompasses the transmission and recording of some of the major works of the medieval Welsh canon. And it is no coincidence that the written survivals of these texts can be mapped on to the monastic foundations of the Cistercians, since without their support of manuscript production in general, and of Welsh-language culture in particular, it is almost certain that the medieval Welsh canon would be considerably smaller than it is today. The travel routes around Ceredigion extended outwards to Whitland abbey further south, to Valle Crucis in the north-east, near Llangollen, and to Strata Marcella on the English border at Welshpool, all centres of literary production where poets visited and monks made manuscripts, at first in Latin only, but increasingly, from the mid thirteenth century, in the Welsh language. This model of literary production has an analogue in Cornwall, where the monastic community at Glasney College, Penryn, described in Chapter 27, produced vernacular texts in co-operation with secular patrons and poets.

The emergence of a vigorous native tradition of vernacular book-production can be directly related to the Edwardian conquest of north Wales in 1282—the most culturally charged date in Welsh history—and the subsequent efforts of writers and patrons to deal with the trauma of the loss of Welsh independence. The two Ceredigion locales of Strata Florida and Parcrhydderch, one monastic and one secular, provide case studies of the ways in which this response to trauma was played out during the fourteenth century, through the processes of cultural production and transmission.<sup>2</sup>

## Strata Florida and the Cistercians in Wales

The Cistercian abbey of Strata Florida in Ceredigion, west Wales, is one of the most significant locations for the production of early Welsh manuscripts, along with a number of other Cistercian abbeys in Wales. Working deliberately against the grain of twelfth-century monasticism, which seemed to aspire more towards worldly wealth

<sup>2</sup> On the significance of Ceredigion as the home of some of Wales's most important manuscripts, see Bowen, 'Beirdd a Noddwyr y Bedwaredd Ganrif ar Ddeg'.

than spiritual perfection, the Cistercians chose to live in isolated places and to form self-sufficient communities that were not dependent on exploitative revenues from tenants. Wales, with its small population and good farming land, offered the ideal topography for Cistercian settlement, and monks arrived at Tintern in 1131 to found the second Cistercian abbey in Britain (the first was at Waverley) and the first in Wales.<sup>3</sup>

Wales had already received a number of monastic foundations from the early twelfth century, particularly the Augustinian orders, and the Cistercians initially settled in Wales under the dominant Anglo-Norman rule. Cistercian foundations at Whitland (1140) and Margam (1147) were sent by Bernard of Clairvaux, and Whitland in particular became a significant mother house for later foundations. From Whitland, monks were sent out to form new communities at Strata Florida (1164), Strata Marcella (1170), and Cwmhir (1176). These three houses went on to found their own daughter houses, at Llantarnam (1179) and Rheydnog Felen (later Aberconwy, 1186), both from Strata Florida; Cymer (1198–9) from Cwmhir; and Valle Crucis (1201) from Strata Marcella.

It was from Whitland that monks were sent to establish a new settlement in west Wales, probably near the small stream known as the Fflur, which would later become the abbey of Strata Florida.<sup>4</sup> This daughter house was first established in 1164, just as Ceredigion was returning to Welsh rule. The great Norman family of the Clares, who had owned most of Ceredigion after the Norman Conquest, were driven out of the area and their vassal, Robert Fitz Stephen, who had encouraged the Cistercians to settle by the Fflur, was captured in 1165 by Rhys ap Gruffudd, ‘Lord Rhys’ of Deheubarth (d. 1197), who had gained control of all of south Wales including Ceredigion. The patronage of the new Cistercian settlement therefore changed from Anglo-Norman to Welsh, and from that time the Cistercian order in Wales was characterized by its close involvement with Welsh affairs, including the native Welsh language and culture. By 1184, the monks of Strata Florida had moved to land provided by Rhys ap Gruffudd, on the site where the remains of the abbey still stand, and embarked on the construction of a handsome building whose bell, the final touch, was not installed until 1255.<sup>5</sup> Located only 15 miles (24 km) from the old *clas* church of Llanbadarn Fawr, just outside Aberystwyth, Strata Florida quickly established itself as the pre-eminent scriptorium of Ceredigion.

Like all the Cistercian foundations in Wales, the monks at Strata Florida supported their Welsh patrons and allied themselves to the Welsh cause in the ongoing struggle with England. Most of the abbots of Strata Florida had Welsh names (in contrast to the men of Norman and English descent who dominated the established Church in Wales),

<sup>3</sup> Cowley, *Monastic Order in South Wales*.

<sup>4</sup> It is likely that the Cistercian settlement on the Fflur took over an earlier monastery founded by the Welsh leader Rhys ap Tudur (d. 1090). See Roberts, ‘History and Architecture of Strata Florida Abbey’, 114–16.

<sup>5</sup> On the history of Strata Florida abbey, see Robinson, *Strata Florida Abbey*; Williams, *The Cistercian Abbey of Strata Florida*; Bowen, ‘The Monastic Economy of the Cistercians at Strata Florida’.

and many of the Welsh princes of south Wales before 1294 were buried at the abbey of Strata Florida, including its earliest patron, Rhys ap Gruffudd, and a number of his descendants such as Maredudd ab Owain (d. 1265), lord of Ceredigion.<sup>6</sup> In 1238, Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, the prince of Gwynedd, summoned all the native rulers of Wales to a great assembly at Strata Florida where he convinced them to swear allegiance to his son Dafydd ap Llywelyn (d. 1246) as their next leader. As George Roberts said, ‘Strata Florida was the Westminster Abbey of Wales.’<sup>7</sup>

The abbey occasionally suffered repercussions from the English because of its support for the Welsh: in 1212, struggling with the ambitious prince of Gwynedd, Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, King John threatened to destroy the abbey and imposed a fine of £800, ‘a crippling debt still being paid off in 1253’.<sup>8</sup> During the Welsh wars of Edward I in 1276–7 and 1282–3, the abbey suffered structural damage for which it later received compensation from the king and permission to rebuild, with Edward declaring that the damage had been ‘contrary to our wishes’.<sup>9</sup> A severe fire in 1286, presumably accidental, resulted in major damage to the abbey’s interior, and the building suffered again during the rebellion of Madog ap Llywelyn against the English in 1294–5. By the time of the more widespread revolt led by Owain Glyn Dŵr, starting in 1400, the fortunes of the abbey had begun to decline, and Henry IV had no hesitation in requisitioning the abbey for his troops and horses, which were billeted there in 1407 and 1415 as a base from which to wage war against Owain and his supporters. The fabric of the building and its interiors never recovered from this invasion and remained in a state of chronic disrepair throughout the fifteenth century, despite the stalwart efforts of its abbots, particularly Rhys (1436–41) and Morgan ap Rhys (1444–86). When the abbey was closed down in 1539, under Henry VIII, only seven monks with their abbot remained, and the building was in a state of near-collapse. All that remains today is the magnificent façade of the abbey’s entrance and some other traces of the original lay-out.

## Strata Florida and early Welsh literature

From pre-Norman times, there is evidence of a strong tradition of Latin writing in Wales, emanating from a small number of religious centres, including St David’s, Llanbadarn Fawr, Neath abbey, and the Cistercian foundations.<sup>10</sup> Llanbadarn Fawr, near Aberystwyth in Ceredigion, was an ancient *clas* church on a pre-Norman model where a mixed community of lay men and women along with clerics, some of them

<sup>6</sup> For a list of princes buried at Strata Florida, see Roberts, ‘History and Architecture of Strata Florida Abbey’, 131–4.

<sup>7</sup> Roberts, ‘History and Architecture of Strata Florida Abbey’, 122.

<sup>8</sup> Robinson, *Strata Florida Abbey*, 14.

<sup>9</sup> Robinson, *Strata Florida Abbey*, 15.

<sup>10</sup> Conway, ‘Towards a Cultural Context for the Eleventh-Century Llanbadarn Manuscripts’; Chadwick, ‘Intellectual Life in West Wales’, 162–72.

married, supported manuscript production in a religious context. From the twelfth century, it was gradually superseded by monastic foundations, particularly those of the Cistercians, and by the fourteenth century it was a parish church.<sup>11</sup> Most of the earliest Latin literature from Wales is religious, including saints' lives and copies of patristic texts that show that Welsh clerics were in touch with the wider world of monastic learning.<sup>12</sup> A number of manuscripts containing Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, 'History of the Kings of Britain' (c.1136) have a Welsh provenance, and the translation of this history into Welsh, under the title *Brut y Brenhinedd*, 'History of the [British] Kings', is one of the earliest texts in Welsh to survive, and among the most copied.<sup>13</sup> This thirteenth-century translation is associated with the Cistercian abbey at Valle Crucis, part of the network of Cistercian foundations responsible for the preservation of what remains of the medieval Welsh literary canon.

Manuscripts containing literature in Welsh do not begin to appear until the middle of the thirteenth century, coinciding with the escalation of hostilities in Wales by the English crown. The Cistercian foundations in Wales, supporters of the native Welsh princes before 1282, were largely responsible for this renaissance of vernacular literature in the new political climate following the Edwardian conquest. The problem of the 'missing manuscripts' (assuming there must have been earlier records of writing in Welsh, though it is by no means a straightforward task to identify the scriptoria where vernacular writing might have been undertaken in Wales) has been addressed in various ways, but perhaps a more interesting question is why the production and preservation of vernacular writing began to flourish towards the end of the thirteenth century and gained in popularity during the succeeding century. Part of the answer lies in the rise of a Welsh-speaking cultural identity in opposition to a dominant English regime, together with a change of literary patronage, both precipitated by the Edwardian conquest of north Wales in 1282. The vernacular texts produced throughout the fourteenth century were, consciously or unconsciously, a response to the trauma of 1282.

In that year, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, the last independent prince of north Wales, was killed in battle against the army of the English king, Edward I, and with his death Wales lost its political independence. This event was a major turning point in the political and social history of Wales, leading swiftly to its appropriation, in 1284, into an English

<sup>11</sup> On the early monastic *clas* in Wales, see Williams, *Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation*, 17–18; Chadwick, 'Intellectual Life in West Wales'. On manuscript production in the *clasau*, especially St David's and Llanbadarn Fawr, see Lapidge, 'The Welsh-Latin Poetry of Sulien's Family'. Gerald of Wales deplored what he saw as the immorality of the *clas* order, which was a survival of the Celtic Church and did not follow any of the later Continental models of monastic rule.

<sup>12</sup> For more information about Latin texts produced in Wales, see Lapidge and Sharpe, *Bibliography of Celtic-Latin Literature, 400–1200*; Lapidge, 'The Welsh-Latin Poetry of Sulien's Family'.

<sup>13</sup> Two early manuscripts (mid 13th century) containing *Brut y Brenhinedd* are National Library of Wales (NLW) MS Peniarth 44 and NLW MS Llanstephan 1. Daniel Huws associates both these manuscripts with Valle Crucis and suggests that *Brut y Brenhinedd*, 'in most of its versions, seems to have been a Valle Crucis text' (Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, 53). The standard descriptive handlist of manuscripts containing Welsh texts is Evans, *Report on Manuscripts in the Welsh Language*.

institutional infrastructure of government and administration.<sup>14</sup> But it was also an apocalyptic event for Welsh men of learning, one that largely determined literary and cultural production for the next century and a half. Poets expressed a sense of national devastation, exemplified most vividly by Gruffudd ab yr Ynad Coch's elegy for Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, a highly charged piece of rhetoric which begins: 'Oer calon dan frown o fraw—allwynin | Am frenin, dderwin ddôr, Aberffraw' ('Heart cold in the breast with terror, grieving | For a king, oak door, of Aberffraw').<sup>15</sup> The writer of the fourteenth-century chronicle, *Brenhinedd y Saesson*, says of the death of Llywelyn: 'Ac yna y bwriwyd holl Gymry y'r llawr', 'And then all Wales was cast to the ground.'<sup>16</sup> In the monastic houses, particularly those of the Cistercians, scribes set about commemorating the loss of Welsh independence and, supported by local patrons, addressing the loss by producing major anthologies of vernacular literature and history which came to form the bedrock of the medieval Welsh canon.

Following the Edwardian conquest, the native Welsh aristocracy was comprehensively 'disappeared'—through death, imprisonment, or claustration—by a king who never wanted to hear from a future Welsh claimant to the kingship of Britain. In place of these princely patrons of Welsh literature, the gentry class, or *uchelwyr*, men whose status as freemen depended on their ownership of family land, took over the role of literary patrons and the *cywyddwyr* flocked to their courts and manor houses. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Wales were truly the age of the poets of the *uchelwyr*, mobile and well-born men who composed praise-poems and occasional songs, often humorous and satirical, for the entertainment of the gentry and also for the clergy, whose abbeys and churches they also visited on their bardic circuits. Though their work was not recorded (or at least, does not survive in writing) until a generation or more after they were active, it is this poetry, along with its audiences, patrons, and social context, which most characterizes Welsh literature in our period of 1348 to 1418.

The manuscripts with which Strata Florida can be associated most strongly contain Welsh histories, poetry, and prose. From the twelfth century, the Cistercian foundations in Wales were associated with keeping annals of Welsh history: one of the surviving versions of the Latin *Annales Cambriae* was written at Whitland.<sup>17</sup> In west Wales, Strata Florida quickly superseded the church at Llanbadarn Fawr as the major scriptorium in the area and began to keep Welsh annals (in Latin) at the abbey from the 1170s.<sup>18</sup> More significantly, Strata Florida was perhaps the first place to produce a history of Wales in the Welsh language, under the title of *Brut y Tywysogion*, 'Chronicle of the Princes', inspired by Geoffrey of Monmouth's history of Britain and its founder

<sup>14</sup> Key studies on the significance of 1282–4 include Davies, *Conquest, Co-Existence and Change*; Smith, *Llywelyn ap Gruffudd*; Roberts, 'The Significance of 1284'.

<sup>15</sup> The Welsh text of the poem is in *Oxford Book of Welsh Verse*, no. 36; the English translation is in *Oxford Book of Welsh Verse in English*, no. 22.

<sup>16</sup> *Brenhinedd y Saesson*, 258, ll. 19–20 (Welsh text) and 259, l. 23 (English translation).

<sup>17</sup> The other two surviving versions from Wales were written at St David's and Neath. See Hughes, 'Welsh Latin Chronicles'.

<sup>18</sup> Robinson, *Strata Florida Abbey*, 9.



Brutus.<sup>19</sup> This Welsh chronicle represents a continuation of Geoffrey's *Historia*, picking up from where Geoffrey ended, with the death of the British king, Cadwaladr, and ending, perhaps deliberately, with the death of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd in 1282. The chronicle was based on a lost Latin version, probably ending in 1282, that was itself likely compiled at Strata Florida in the late thirteenth century, some time after the fire of 1286. The two earliest manuscripts of *Brut y Tywysogion*, NLW MS Peniarth 20 and BL MS Cotton Cleopatra B.v, both dated to about 1330, are associated with Valle Crucis, indicating a clear direction of cultural transmission across Wales, between Strata Florida and Valle Crucis. Other Welsh histories, particularly *Brut y Brenhinedd*, based on Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*, and *Brenhinedd y Saesson*, combining Welsh and English history, survive in manuscripts, mainly from the mid fourteenth century, which are also associated with Strata Florida and Valle Crucis, indicating the important role these abbeys played in recording native Welsh tradition and the ways in which they shared texts to be copied.<sup>20</sup> With the production of these Welsh histories, the Cistercian abbeys were not simply recording the events of the past; they were reconstructing the past in a vernacular which had become a language of resistance.

Throughout the fourteenth century, Strata Florida appears to have been one of the leading scriptoria producing literature in the Welsh language, with some of Wales's most significant literary manuscripts associated with it.<sup>21</sup> The manuscript known as *Llyfr Ancr*, the 'Book of the Anchorite' (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Jesus College 119), after its author who refers to himself as the 'anchorite of Llanddewibrefi', is dated to c.1346 and has close associations with Strata Florida: Daniel Huws states that the Anchorite was probably not a monk but 'was working within the penumbra of Strata Florida'.<sup>22</sup> The manuscript, commissioned by a friend of the author, contains religious texts in Welsh, including lives of St David and St Beuno, a vision of St Paul, and *Ymborth yr Enaid*, 'Nourishment for the Soul'. The hand of the Anchorite appears in four other mid-fourteenth-century manuscripts associated with Strata Florida: NLW MSS Peniarth 46 and 47i (both containing copies of *Brut y Brenhinedd*), NLW MS Peniarth

<sup>19</sup> One of the earliest surviving copies of the *Brut*, NLW MS Peniarth 18 (mid 14th century), is associated with Strata Florida, and Daniel Huws believes that the *Brut* was in origin a Strata Florida text (*Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, 53–4).

<sup>20</sup> The earliest manuscript of *Brenhinedd y Saesson* (London, British Library, MS Cotton Cleopatra B.v, c.1330) almost certainly comes from Valle Crucis, probably using a Latin original or Latin sources from Strata Florida. See Smith, 'Historical Writing in Medieval Wales', 84. One of the most important manuscript anthologies containing early heroic poetry, *Llyfr Taliesin*, the 'Book of Taliesin' (Aberystwyth, NLW, MS Peniarth 2, before 1350) may have Cistercian connections, as the scribal hand of the Book of Taliesin also wrote some of the surviving copies of the Welsh chronicles, *Brut y Tywysogion* and *Brut y Brenhinedd*, which are associated with Strata Florida and Valle Crucis respectively. See Haycock, 'Llyfr Taliesin', 365–6.

<sup>21</sup> As Daniel Huws points out, we have no surviving manuscripts which can definitely said to have been written at Strata Florida, but circumstantial evidence converts a number of possibilities into strong probabilities. See *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, 216 n. 36.

<sup>22</sup> Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, 54. Llanddewibrefi is a small village in Ceredigion with a twelfth-century parish church dedicated to St David.

18 (containing *Brut y Tywysogyon*), and NLW MS Peniarth 5, containing part of the larger collection known as *Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch*, the ‘White Book of Rhydderch’.<sup>23</sup>

The White Book of Rhydderch, originally a single anthology now preserved in two separate manuscripts, NLW MSS Peniarth 4 and 5 (c.1350) is not only one of the most important collections of medieval Welsh literature but also provides a vital link between the abbey of Strata Florida and the family of influential literary patrons associated with Parchrhydderch. The White Book is a substantial compendium containing many of the canonical texts of medieval Welsh literature, including a copy of *Brut y Brenhinedd*, religious works, and the earliest surviving texts of the prose narratives known collectively as the Mabinogion.<sup>24</sup> There are also some popular texts translated from Latin and French, including adaptations of the Charlemagne legends and a Welsh version of a lost Anglo-Norman text of the romance of Bevis of Hampton, called in Welsh *Ystorya Bown Hamptwn*. However, the White Book, as it survives, contains very little poetry apart from a few of the *hengerdd* (early poetry), including some of the Merlin poems, and a small number of poems in the contemporary *cywydd* metre, some of them ascribed to the most famous of the fourteenth-century poets, Dafydd ap Gwilym.<sup>25</sup>

The White Book anthology was almost certainly commissioned by, or for, Rhydderch ap Ieuan Llwyd (c.1325–c.1400) who lived in the manor house of Parchrhydderch in Llangeitho, some ten miles (16 km) from Strata Florida.<sup>26</sup> Rhydderch was the son of Ieuan Llwyd ap Ieuan (fl. c.1332–43) and his wife Angharad, members of the *uchelwyr*, the Welsh gentry who took over the cultural and social leadership of native Wales following the fall of the princes after 1282. Ieuan Llwyd was descended from Maredudd ab Owain, lord of Ceredigion (d. 1265), who was himself a descendant of Rhys ap Gruffudd and was, like Rhys, buried at Strata Florida. Maredudd left behind him a generation of literary patrons, and this responsibility for Welsh literature, religious and secular, was taken over by Ieuan Llwyd, his son Rhydderch, and grandson Ieuan ap Rhydderch, in the wake of 1282. Ieuan’s wife, Angharad, could also trace her ancestry back to one of the royal houses of independent Wales, and this connection with the old nobility was clearly one aspect of the dominant cultural and political position enjoyed by many of the *uchelwyr* families after 1282.

<sup>23</sup> This anthology and its slightly later counterpart, *Llyfr Coch Hergest*, the Red Book of Hergest (c.1400), produced in the south of Wales, contain virtually the entire corpus of surviving medieval Welsh literature. These great anthologies can be compared with those produced in Ireland at around the same time, particularly the Book of Ballymote and the Yellow Book of Lecan, all of them ‘exemplars of literary insularism’, as Bernard O’Donoghue writes in Chapter 25.

<sup>24</sup> For a modern reproduction of the White Book, see *Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch*, ed. Evans. The White Book lacks one of the eleven tales of the Mabinogion, namely *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, ‘The Dream of Rhonabwy’. The term ‘Mabinogion’ was first used by Lady Charlotte Guest as an umbrella title for her translations of all the tales which she published in 1849.

<sup>25</sup> Huws speculates that the White Book may have originally contained a substantial collection of poetry by the *gogynfeirdd*, the ‘poets of the princes’. See *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, 227–68.

<sup>26</sup> Huws, ‘Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch’, 20; Huws, ‘The Welsh Book’, 393–4. On Ieuan Llwyd and his family, see *Gwaith Llywelyn Brydydd Hoddnant*, 6–13.

Ieuan Llwyd, Angharad, and Rhydderch are all mentioned by contemporary poets and were clearly known and highly regarded as patrons of native Welsh culture. Poets of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are known as *cywyddwyr*, poets composing mainly in the *cywydd* metre, men (and some women) like Iolo Goch who inherited the older tradition of bardic praise poetry and who adapted it to suit the cultural needs of the new kind of patrons, local gentry families like the Rhydderch family, many of whom owed their status and prestige to holding office under the English administration.<sup>27</sup> The poet Llywelyn Goch ap Meurig Hen, active around the middle of the fourteenth century, sang a praise poem to Rhydderch and his cousin Llywelyn Fychan ap Llywelyn Goch whose estate at Anhuniog was about three miles from Parcrhydderch. He pairs them together as princely heroes of old Wales, generous and sociable but ready to fight, using the anachronistic, but popular, imagery of Welsh warrior society before 1282:

Milwraidd gorff mal Urien,  
 Mygr Rydderch gaethserch goethson;  
 Meinlew ail mwyn Lywelyn,  
 Meddgell ddifachell, Fychan.<sup>28</sup>

Body of a warrior like Urien,  
 noble Rhydderch, staunch his love, elegant his speech;  
 like an alert lion is gentle Llywelyn Fychan,  
 with an unlocked mead-cellar.

The same poet also addressed a poem to the abbot of Strata Florida, Llywelyn Fychan ap Llywelyn, abbot from 1344 to 1380, describing him as ‘arglwydd Ystrad Fflur a’i phennaeth a’i llywodraeth da’ (‘lord of Strata Florida and its leader and its good governor’); the main point of the poem is to give thanks to God for the abbot’s recovery from *haint*, ‘disease’, a possible reference to the plague.

The family at Parcrhydderch are associated with an important literary manuscript, *Llawysgrif Hendregadredd*, the Hendregadredd manuscript (Aberystwyth, NLW MS 6680), probably transcribed in both Parcrhydderch and Strata Florida between 1300 and 1350. Daniel Huws has shown that the manuscript comprises three strata: Stratum I, compiled by the main scribe, Alpha, in about 1300; Stratum II, copied by nineteen separate hands of the early fourteenth century; and Stratum III, copied by a further twenty hands around the middle of the century.<sup>29</sup> The first two layers of text, inscribed at Strata Florida, comprise a wide selection of poems by the *gogynfeirdd*, the poets who supported the native princes before 1282; indeed, this manuscript is our most important source for the work of the *gogynfeirdd*. As Huws suggests, the original compiler of the manuscript, based at Strata Florida, seemed to be motivated by the events of 1282 as the end of an era and ‘built a memorial to it’,<sup>30</sup> capturing the glory of independent

<sup>27</sup> On the role of the *uchelwyr*, or ‘squires’, see Davies, *Conquest, Co-Existence and Change*, 415–19; Carr, ‘An Aristocracy in Decline’.

<sup>28</sup> *Gwaith Llywelyn Goch ap Meurig Hen*, no. 4, ll. 5–8. The translation is mine.

<sup>29</sup> Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, 76–7. <sup>30</sup> Huws, *Medieval Welsh Manuscripts*, 215.

Welsh rule as seen through the eyes of the praise-poets. Although a collection of literary pieces, the manuscript has been compiled on the model of a chronicle, with many different hands contributing to it—an early example of a literary history of Wales which, like most literary histories, performs a nation-building function.

The third layer of the manuscript, mainly filling up spaces on pages throughout the book, seems to be of a different nature and indicates that the book was very possibly moved from Strata Florida to Parcrhydderch. The poems written as part of this third stratum are all contemporary, the work of fourteenth-century *cywyddwyr* writing for *uchelwyr* patrons like the family at Parcrhydderch, and it is striking that a number of the pieces in this stratum are praise-poems to the family of Ieuan Llwyd. One of the poems attributed to Dafydd ap Gwilym may well be in his own hand (a poem to the cross in Carmarthen)<sup>31</sup> and this suggests the possibility of other authorial holographs appearing in the manuscript. One can imagine the book functioning as a kind of visitor's book at Parcrhydderch, where visiting poets would be encouraged to copy one of their own compositions into the book in their own hand.

## Dafydd ap Gwilym and the *cywyddwyr*

Undoubtedly the most significant literary movement in Ceredigion, and elsewhere in Wales between 1348 and 1418, was the emergence of the *cywyddwyr*, poets composing in the *cywydd* metre, and their patrons among the *uchelwyr*. Both poets and patrons were working in response to the Edwardian conquest of 1282 and its aftermath, seeking to salvage what remained of a glorious tradition of bardic song and to refashion it into a literary movement relevant to the context of their own times, a context in which economic and political pragmatism called for collaboration with the English government alongside a determined support of Welsh-language culture as a language of identity and resistance. While the poetry contains evidence of English linguistic borrowings into Welsh, unremarkable in that particular political context, in all other respects it turns its back on English literary traditions to draw its inspiration from earlier Welsh writing and from Irish, French, and Latin material, reflecting a direct pathway of cultural transmission linking Europe, Wales, and Ireland.<sup>32</sup>

As with most of the 'poets of the gentry', we know little about Dafydd's life apart from what is mentioned in his own poetry and in the work of his contemporaries.<sup>33</sup> He almost certainly came from Ceredigion, in the parish of Llanbadarn Fawr, and, as the son of a gentry family, may have been educated at a school run by the monks of Strata

<sup>31</sup> For an edition of the poem see *Gwaith Llywelyn Brydydd Hoddnant*.

<sup>32</sup> On these cultural influences, see Fulton, *Dafydd ap Gwilym and the European Context*; Edwards, *Dafydd ap Gwilym: Influences and Analogues*; Sims-Williams, *Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature*.

<sup>33</sup> The standard edition of the Dafydd ap Gwilym corpus is *Cerddi Dafydd ap Gwilym*, ed. Johnston et al. See also the website, <http://www.dafyddapgwilym.net> [accessed 28 February 2013], for translations and notes in English, and audio recordings of the poems read aloud.

Florida. By the beginning of our period, in 1348, Dafydd's career was at its height but it seems likely that he died not long afterwards, still a fairly young man.<sup>34</sup> His poetry bears witness to the kind of travelling life that most professional poets pursued, moving from town to estate to abbey to fulfil commissions and visit patrons. In one poem, he describes a journey he makes for love, walking across Ceredigion to visit his beloved, Morfudd, a woman who appears in a number of his poems:

I Fwlch yr awn yn falch rydd,  
Mau boen dwfn, Meibion Dafydd,  
Ac ymaith draw i'r Gamallt  
Ac i'r Rhiw er gwiw ei gwallt.  
[ . . . ] Rhedais heb adail Heilin  
Rhediad bloesg fytheiad blin.  
Sefais goris llys Ifor  
Fal manach mewn cilfach côr  
I geisio heb addo budd  
Gyfarfod â gwiw Forfudd.<sup>35</sup>

To Bwlch Meibion Dafydd I would go,  
eager and ready, mine was a deep agony,  
and away yonder to Y Gamallt  
and to Y Rhiw for the sake of the girl with beautiful hair.  
[ . . . ] I ran past the home of Heilin  
like a panting hound out of breath.  
I stopped below Ifor's court,  
like a monk in a corner of the choir-stall,  
to wait, without any promise of success,  
for a meeting with lovely Morfudd.

The place names in the poem are all in the neighbourhood of Dafydd's home at Bro Gynin (near Aberystwyth) and trace a journey of several miles that he could easily have made on foot in the course of an evening.<sup>36</sup>

Dafydd also refers in his poetry to Llanbadarn Fawr and Strata Florida, both important cultural landmarks in his life. The church at Llanbadarn Fawr, previously an abbey and one of the most important scriptoria in Wales, was by the fourteenth century simply a parish church. One of his most famous poems sees him in church at Llanbadarn on a Sunday, passing the time looking at the young women in the congregation rather than attending to the service:

Ni bu Sul yn Llanbadarn  
Na bewn, ac eraill a'i barn,

<sup>34</sup> R. Geraint Gruffydd speculates that Dafydd's life span was c.1315 to c.1350 (*Dafydd ap Gwilym*, 21–2).

<sup>35</sup> *Cerddi Dafydd ap Gwilym*, no. 96, ll. 19–22 and 33–8. The translation is mine.

<sup>36</sup> On the place names, see the notes to the poem in *Cerddi Dafydd ap Gwilym*, 694–5, and the notes to Loomis's translation (*Dafydd ap Gwilym: Poems*, 296–8).

A'm wyneb at y ferch goeth  
A'm gwegil at Dduw gwiwgoeth.<sup>37</sup>

There was no Sunday in Llanbadarn  
when I was not—and others may judge this—  
with my face turned towards a delicate girl  
and the back of my head towards the fine true God.

When Dafydd died, he was reputedly buried in the churchyard at Strata Florida, about 15 miles (24 km) to the south-east of Llanbadarn Fawr. One of his contemporaries, Gruffydd Gryg, wrote an elegy for him (though, according to the conventions of the time, the elegy may have been written before Dafydd actually died):

Yr ywen i oreuwas  
Ger mur Ystrad Fflur a'i phlas,  
Da Duw wrthyd, gwynfyd gwýdd,  
Dy dyfu yn dý Dafydd.<sup>38</sup>

This yew-tree for the best of men,  
near the walls of Strata Florida and its hall;  
God's blessing on you, happy tree,  
for growing as a house for Dafydd.

Dafydd was also in regular contact with the family at Parcrhydderch—as we have seen, he very probably copied one of his own poems into their manuscript miscellany, the famous Hendregadredd manuscript. He also addressed a mock-elegy to Rhydderch ab Ieuan Llwyd, a near-contemporary of Dafydd's who almost certainly outlived him, calling him 'trugarog o farchog' ('a merciful knight') and praising '[ei] lwyddiant a'i oleuddawn, | A'i ras, gyweithas ieithydd, | A'i glod [...] ' ('his success and his bright talent, | his gift [as] an accomplished linguist, | and his fame [...]').<sup>39</sup>

## Owain Glyn Dŵr and the rebellion of 1400

The trauma of 1282, worked through by the generations of Welsh poets, patrons, and monastic scribes who lived in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, was eventually superseded, and in some senses resolved, by another intense political upheaval, the revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr in 1400. The fourteenth century had been a time of relative peace in Wales. Immediately following the Edwardian conquest, the appropriated territories in the north and west became crown lands, known as the Principality, as distinct from the Marcher lands owned by English magnates descended,

<sup>37</sup> *Cerddi Dafydd ap Gwilym*, no. 137, ll. 19–22; the translation is mine.

<sup>38</sup> *Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym*, 429, ll. 1–4. The translation is mine.

<sup>39</sup> *Cerddi Dafydd ap Gwilym*, no. 10, l. 42 and ll. 38–40, my translations. Dafydd also addressed an elegy to Rhydderch's mother, Angharad, wife of Ieuan Llwyd. See *Cerddi Dafydd ap Gwilym*, no. 9.

for the most part, from earlier Norman settlers.<sup>40</sup> As part of the Principality, Ceredigion—or Cardiganshire as it was called under the new system of English counties imported into Wales—came under English rule, though here, as elsewhere, prominent members of the Welsh gentry, such as the family at Parcrhydderch, were co-opted into the service of the crown to help manage a native population which might otherwise rebel against their new English rulers.<sup>41</sup>

The most dramatic events of our period began in 1400, with the uprising led by a prominent Welsh landowner, Owain Glyn Dŵr, who held, directly from the crown, extensive lands in the north-east of Wales, in the county of Denbighshire.<sup>42</sup> Though Owain soon co-opted some very prominent English supporters, notably Edmund Mortimer and Henry Percy, the earl of Northumberland, who were pursuing their own political agenda against the new king, Henry IV, Owain's strategy was to direct his armies against the towns of Wales, many of them centres of English commercial colonization. Ceredigion and Strata Florida were caught up in the violence. The abbey was requisitioned by the avenging armies of Henry IV as a base for their counter-attacks on rebel strongholds in west Wales. The castle at Aberystwyth, garrisoned by the English, fell to Owain's rebels in 1404 and was defended by Owain himself after a full-scale siege by an English army led by the prince of Wales and the duke of York. The English finally regained control of Aberystwyth and the parish of Llanbadarn Fawr late in 1408, as Owain's revolt began to run out of steam.

Despite—or perhaps because of—the ferocity and large scale of Owain's rebellion, which, in tandem with the English-led coup attempted by the earl of Northumberland, almost brought down the rule of Henry IV, there is a marked silence about it from the poets of the age. Poets of the late fourteenth century, including Iolo Goch and Gruffudd Llwyd, wrote commissioned praise-poems to Owain before the rebellion, describing him as the great lord of landed estates and illustrious family: 'Anoberi un barwn | Ond y rhyw yr henyw hwn' ('Worthless is every single baron | except the stock from which this one stems'), sang Iolo; 'Eryr digrif afrifed | Owain helm gain, hael am ged' ('Most wonderful eagle | Owain of the fine helmet, generous with gifts'), sang Gruffudd Llwyd.<sup>43</sup> Only one poem can be dated to a time during the rebellion, and it was composed by Ieuan ap Rhydderch, the son of the Parcrhydderch family, in 1402.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> The main instruments of the Edwardian settlement were put into place through the Statute of Rhuddlan in 1284. For further details see Waters, *Edwardian Settlement of North Wales*; Davies, *Conquest, Co-Existence and Change*.

<sup>41</sup> An early rebellion of 1294–5, led by Madog ap Llywelyn, a descendant of the old royal house of Gwynedd, was put down by English garrisons. See Davies, *Conquest, Co-Existence and Change*, 382–6. The territory of Cardigan was established by the Normans in the twelfth century and became the county of Cardiganshire (Ceredigion) under the administrative restructuring of Edward I, when the county system was introduced to Wales from England. See Lloyd, *The Story of Ceredigion*; Benbough-Jackson, *Cardiganshire*; Griffiths, 'The Making of Medieval Cardigan'.

<sup>42</sup> Owain had three large estates, two in the north-east, and a third, inherited through his mother, in Ceredigion (Iscoed). For details of his land-holdings, see Davies, *Revolt of Owain Glyn Dŵr*, 131–6.

<sup>43</sup> *Iolo Goch: Poems*, no. 9, ll. 11–12; *Gwaith Gruffudd Llwyd*, no. 11, ll. 1–2 (my translations).

<sup>44</sup> See *Gwaith Ieuan ap Rhydderch*.

Well after the rebellion had been quashed and Owain had died (probably some time soon after 1415), poets felt safe enough to mention his name again, but only in passing as an important ancestor or predecessor whose descendants were themselves now the patrons of literary production. As John Davies says, ‘Even among the gentry who had supported Owain—perhaps among them in particular—there was a strong desire to forget him. They sacrificed their past to their future.’<sup>45</sup>

The seismic disturbances of 1400–15, when families found themselves on opposite sides of the cause, and when men whose status derived from service to the English crown had to choose between treason or collaboration, led to subtle shifts in Welsh cultural identity. Poets increasingly found new sources of patronage from among the English churchmen and gentry living in Wales, while the role of the Cistercian abbeys in cultural production began to decline. In a new climate of gentry co-operation with the English after 1415, with the trauma of 1282 well in the past, the Glyn Dŵr rebellion could not be mentioned.

With its small towns, poor communication routes, challenging topography, and ethnic divisions, Wales in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century could be regarded—and almost certainly was so regarded by English visitors from the royal administration and the larger English towns—as marginal. To outsiders, most of the Principality, the area annexed by Edward I, was peripheral to the major seats of power among the Marcher lordships, towns, and great estates of the English nobility. Yet within a small area of Ceredigion, amidst some of the most beautiful countryside in the whole of Britain, travelling poets, clerics, and noble patrons forged links with each other, and with the other major centres of cultural production in Wales, links which ensured that a tradition of Welsh writing survived the wreckage of 1282 (and indeed of 1400–15) to continue into the fifteenth century and beyond.

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<sup>45</sup> Davies, *History of Wales*, 203. On the aftermath of the rebellion and its impact on the gentry in Wales, see Griffiths, ‘Gentlemen and Rebels’; Davies, ‘Owain Glyn Dŵr and the Welsh Squirearchy’.



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